

What's Your Acquisition EQ?

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At the Defense Acquisition University (DAU), we teach acquisition professionals the policies, processes and tools of the acquisition profession. We use a variety of learning strategies to enhance the "Intelligence Quotient (IQ)" of the acquisition workforce.

Often missing is the human element. Where are the human performance tools and best practices that can improve acquisition outcomes? DAU recently incorporated a new emotional intelligence tool with

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Table 1. Elements of Emotional Intelligence (EQ-i 2.0)[®]

| Self-Perception | Self-Expression | Interpersonal Skills | Decision Making | Stress Management |
|--------------------------|----------------------|-----------------------------|-----------------|-------------------|
| Self-Regard | Emotional Expression | Interpersonal Relationships | Problem Solving | Flexibility |
| Self-Actualization | Assertiveness | Empathy | Reality Testing | Stress Tolerance |
| Emotional Self-Awareness | Independence | Social Responsibility | Impulse Control | Optimism |

Note: The EQ-i 2.0 is a registered trademark of Multi-Health Systems, Inc. Table adapted by author.

the goal of enhancing the “Emotional Quotient (EQ)” of our workforce. This tool is the EQ-i 2.0[®] (Emotional Quotient Inventory, Version 2.0).

The concept of emotional intelligence goes back to 1983 when Howard Gardner at Harvard University advanced his theory of multiple intelligences, which included social intelligence. Interest skyrocketed when Daniel Goleman, a science writer for the *New York Times*, published his book *Emotional Intelligence: Why It Can Matter More Than IQ* in 1995. Several instruments have been created to assess emotional intelligence, and among them is the EQ-i developed by Multi-Health Systems in Toronto, Canada.

The current version of this assessment, EQ-i 2.0[®], is illustrated in Table 1. It is composed of five categories with three elements (behaviors) in each category. An additional element of well-being (happiness) was added as the final component of the model.

While measures of intelligence (such as IQ) and even personality (such as the Myers-Briggs Type Indicator[®], or MBTI) are thought to test inborn traits, emotional intelligence elements are considered skills that can be learned and further developed. The implication for acquisition professionals is that growing your emotional intelligence can provide a lever or springboard for improving the use of your acquisition intelligence and achieving better workplace results.

According to Dr. Travis Bradbury of TalentSmart, 90 percent of the top performers studied also had high emotional intelligence. On the flip side, just 20 percent of the bottom performers had high emotional intelligence. By using the EQ-i 2.0[®] as a development tool, you can measure, and then work to improve, your emotional intelligence.

Before embarking on the quest to assess and develop your EQ, we need to look for evidence that such effort will pay dividends in the defense acquisition environment. Fortunately, the evidence is readily available. In the early 1990s, DAU embarked on a major research study of program manager (PM) competencies. Twenty PMs from each Service (for a total of 60) were nominated

by their program executive leadership to be interviewed by DAU. The interviews were based on critical incidents that each PM faced and were recorded and analyzed to develop the competency model in Table 2. Independent of the interviews, the PMs were divided into two groups (top versus good performers) based on assessments provided by their senior leadership as well as their direct reports.

When the research data then were analyzed to determine which competencies differentiated the top performers, the six competencies displayed in bold type in Table 2 emerged. Looking at these competencies, the four in italics clearly embody emotional intelligence: political awareness, relationship development, strategic influence and interpersonal assessment. Here is a more detailed look at these four competencies along with a quote for each from the interview transcripts.

Political Awareness. This competency enables a PM to know who the influential players are, what they want and how best to work with them.

“I really had to be sensitive to everybody’s little piece of the pie. The operational community traditionally doesn’t want to get involved with the development community. So you have to handle it with kid gloves to make sure you’re not stepping on anyone’s turf.”

Table 2. PM DoD Competency Model (1990s)

(The six in bold type differentiate top-performing PMs)

| | |
|--|---|
| Sense of Ownership/Mission <i>Political Awareness</i> <i>Relationship Development</i> <i>Strategic Influence</i> <i>Interpersonal Assessment</i> Action Orientation | |
| Decision-Making Competencies: - Critical Inquiry - Proactive Information Gathering - Systems Thinking - Optimizing - Results Orientation | Other Competencies: - Managerial Orientation - Long-term Perspective - Focus on Excellence - Innovativeness/Initiative - Assertiveness |

Source: Defense Acquisition University.

Relationship Development. Time and energy are spent getting to know program sponsors, users and contractors.

"I made a trip to Scotland as a damage-control effort. I tried to restore our credibility. We really did want to help them out. I think they were surprised to see a four-striped Captain come all the way from Washington DC to talk about their problems."

Strategic Influence. This competency enables the building of coalitions and orchestration of situations to overcome obstacles and obtain support.

"I finally recognized that I needed heavy hitters with more influence and authority than I had, so I set up a meeting with the program executive office, the head of procurement, my staff, an attorney adviser and the Army's contract policy expert. In other words, I had to go in there and literally stack the deck in terms of influence and independent representatives who would vouch for what I had said."

Interpersonal Assessment. This competency enables a PM to identify the specific interests, motivations, strengths and weaknesses of others.

"I had one guy, a commander, who was really good, not so much on the technical side, so I had him work with me to pull this thing together. Interestingly enough, he was one of the best leaders I had ever run across, so I could use him to inspire people. A great manager, but not good enough to be captain."

While decision-making skills are part of the competency model in Table 2, none of these skills differentiated the top performers. Another way of explaining this finding is that the interview population of experienced PMs had all developed decision-making skills. But, except for the top performers, they had not developed their emotional intelligence skills.

A more personal example of this focus on emotional intelligence is provided by Capt. Mark Vandroff, PM for Arleigh Burke class destroyers. Here are excerpts from his October 2015 *U.S. Naval Institute Proceedings* article, "Confessions of a Major Program Manager":

- Most Navy Major Program Managers (MPMs) have graduate degrees in a technical field such as engineering or physics and then spend their tours practicing *organizational psychology*.
- The single most important skill an MPM can bring to the job is the ability to *convince a stakeholder* with limited accountability for program success to support a program like his or her life depended on it.
- The most important thing an MPM can build throughout his or her career is *relationships*.
- The Navy's senior leaders must choose MPMs who have a *passion* for their product.

The same focus on emotional intelligence also is found in the commercial sector. In 2012, Google launched a major internal study (as reported in a Feb. 25, 2016, *New York Times* article by Charles Duhigg) codenamed Project Aristotle to investi-

gate why some of their teams achieved dramatic successes while many others did not.

As a data-driven organization, Google gathered extensive data from hundreds of its teams. At the top level, they found that teams that did well on one project usually did well on all their projects. Teams that performed poorly on one task often underperformed on their other tasks.

The research revealed that what distinguished the top performing teams was how team members treated each other. The researchers characterized this difference in terms of group norms. Top performing teams were found to share two specific norms not found in the less successful teams:


Taking turns in conversations. When everyone on the team had a chance to talk, the team did well. But if one person or a small number of members dominated the group discussion, the team was less effective.

Social sensitivity. This relates to team members' skill in "reading" each other. Top performing teams were skilled in telling how each other felt based on their facial expressions, tone of voice and nonverbal cues.

The Google researchers linked their findings to the concept of psychological safety. Teams thrived when members felt safe to openly share their ideas and feelings. These group norms also illustrate the impact of emotional intelligence. By demonstrating these two relationship behaviors, teams at Google were able to dramatically improve their business results.

The above research makes it clear that expert knowledge alone will not always result in successful acquisition outcomes. Acquisition work depends heavily on cross-functional teams. So, in addition to teaching the knowledge base of defense acquisition disciplines, DAU is beginning to offer team assessments and team-based tools. One of these tools is the emotional intelligence EQ-i 2.0® assessment. This assessment offers our acquisition professionals the opportunity to leverage their knowledge and experiences and apply them more effectively in their team-based environment to achieve significantly improved results.

Summary

Success in the complex world of defense acquisition requires that acquisition professionals possess a broad range of knowledge, skills and abilities. But acquisition intelligence (IQ) can only go so far in delivering outcomes for the warfighter. Working to improve your emotional intelligence (EQ) promises dramatic improvement of your personal effectiveness in the near term and significantly improved acquisition results in the far term. 

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